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Your life  
Your death  
Your choice

news  
LETTER

Spring 2020

## Giving our service in a time of pandemic

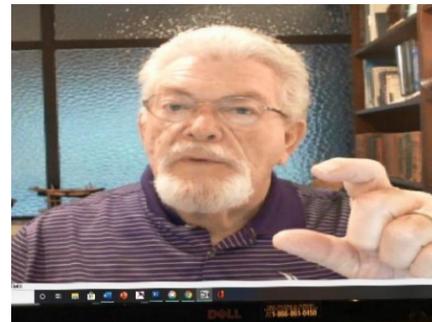
End of Life Washington volunteers and staff are adjusting to the world of coronavirus quarantine.

Our Mercer Island office is now largely shuttered. The three regular occupants – Joan Eads, Sally Thomae, and Kathleen D'Amelio – work in their own homes via forwarded phones, voicemail, email, and the Internet as does Linda Estes from the Tri Cities.

Risa Denenberg was a retired nurse practitioner until the pandemic came along. Soon after COVID-19 arrived she went back to work. "I feel so much better knowing that my training and skills are useful," she says.

Risa also will not let the spread of the virus keep her from helping her EOLWA clients. "I'm not cut out to be a bystander. I am unable to stay at home and still be useful. Our service isn't 'nonessential.' Our presence makes a difference."

Beth Rudolph is another volunteer who wants to keep working with clients – though she can't meet them face-to-face.



**On Skype, Chris Fruitrich discusses nuances of Death with Dignity**

"I don't like working as a VCA by phone," Beth says. But she has little choice, living in a retirement facility currently on lockdown.

"I realize how much I learn from seeing clients and their families and how much they learn about me from seeing me."

Beth says she sees the real difficulty coming because clients are upset because they want us there to be sure everything is done right and for the sake of their family.

All EOLWA volunteers are having to adjust to a world where clients are at the other end of a piece of technology.

Unfortunately this looks like it may be our new normal for some time.

## Your generosity supports our growth

In the 11 years since Washington enacted its Death with Dignity Law, End of Life Washington has grown with the demand for our free services. For example:

- **Our client case load has increased 372%.**
- This year we will personally serve more than 700 clients who need help or information about end-of-life issues.
- **More than 10,000 people will be informed by our presenters on topics including Death with Dignity and advance directives.**
- Our presence in Olympia will press legislators for more access to end-of-life issues.

End of Life Washington is supported almost solely by donations from individuals. We need you now more than ever as we have to learn how to work remotely. These changes cost money as we maintain our work to be available as we always have been.

Please use the attached remittance envelope or go to our website:

[www.Endoflifewa.org/give](http://www.Endoflifewa.org/give)

*Thank you!*

## NEW EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

# Judy Kinney chosen to fill her 'dream job'

I feel very blessed to be writing to you as End of Life Washington's Executive Director, launching what I anticipate will be a long, mutually satisfying working relationship to advance Washingtonians' end-of-life choices.

Five years ago, I told a colleague that being the Executive Director at End of Life Washington (EOLWA) was my dream job. I am humbled and honored to build upon End of Life Washington's accomplishments to date with you to ensure that more Washingtonians can experience meaningful and peace-filled deaths, on their own terms without any barriers.

**"I believe in the power of community."**

I join you and the EOLWA team as a seasoned nonprofit leader, equity and inclusion trainer, life coach, advocate, and community builder. I became an end of life choice advocate in 2012 through my work as the Executive Director of North East Seattle Together (NEST), Seattle's first virtual retirement village. I applied my commitment to end of life choices in my recent role as the Executive Director of the Durham Center for Senior Life in Durham, NC, with a focus on the African-American and LGBTQ elder communities.

I am also the Treasurer for the nationally recognized regional advocacy organization, the Dogwood Alliance, as it integrates a racial justice lens into its work to protect standing Southern forests.

I believe in the power of community to help ensure that a peaceful and personally meaningful death is within each of

our reaches. No one should face intolerable suffering at the end of life. Together, I hope that we can work across generations to gather diverse voices and resources to support residents statewide with their end-of-life choices.

Together, I hope that we build upon the strong foundation and vision that has been established by EOLWA's founders, previous directors, staff, board members and volunteers. I join a strong board, staff, and team of volunteers as you can see in this newsletter. We need you with us more than ever, as we respond to the Covid-19 virus, expand and strengthen an engaged state-wide network of volunteers, physicians, pharmacists, and supporters, and ensure stronger legislative projections for end-of-life choices.

Thank you again for all you do to ensure that you and your neighbors have a full range of end of life choices. I look forward to connecting with you. Feel free to send me a note to say hi at [jkinney@endoflifewa.org](mailto:jkinney@endoflifewa.org).



**Judy Kinney is working part-time now and joins the staff full-time in May.**

In the spirit of community,

Judy Kinney, Executive Director

## BOARD PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

# New additions will propel our growth

The past 12 months have been a dynamic and challenging time for End of Life Washington. We look forward to continued growth and stability as we go forward.



Bob Free

Our recent progress includes:

- Hiring a new, highly qualified Executive Director (See Judy's letter on the front page).
- Bringing aboard three new energetic board members (see below).
- Attracting more dedicated volunteers than at any time in our history.
- Shepherding three important pieces of legislation (see article by our lobbyist, Nancy Sapiro).
- Sponsoring a social media information campaign about DWD and EOLWA throughout Washington.

Much of the credit for our progress goes to our very capable Interim Executive Director Joan Eads, who nurtured and nourished us through the year. She helped us recruit new board members, hired new staff, and made sure we have remained financially stable.

On another high note, we recently received a substantial donation from a longtime anonymous donor which we will keep as financial reserves to make sure EOLWA is viable into the future as the demand for our services rises. Here come the Baby Boomers – we are ready!

Our new board members include Kristy Monahan, an accountant with years of nonprofit experience, who will serve as the organization's Treasurer. Teresa Chiftis, a Microsoft tax director – whose husband used our services three years ago for a peaceful, dignified death –

brings the viewpoint of a family survivor to our board. Beth Rudolph, an experienced Volunteer Client Advisor with EOLWA, will bring to the table a perspective of one who sees clients and other volunteers in the field.

With our added strength, EOLWA is continuing to look at ways we can help all people, even those who may not qualify for the Death with Dignity law. We are launching an initiative to help those facing dementia and Alzheimer's choose a dignified death. Our website now contains an advance directive instructing health care agents and caregivers to stop involuntary feeding and hydrating a patient at the end stages of Alzheimer's, allowing the person to die. We are working on ways to help people with early signs of dementia and Alzheimer's find a way to escape the tragedy of these terrible diseases.

You will hear more about all our initiatives at our 2020 Annual Meeting, in late September/early October, assuming we can gather by then.

We want to keep you informed of the work as we continue to grow. In 2020 – coronavirus or no – we are going to help a record number of clients. We know you care because you have supported us through decades of end-of-life work.



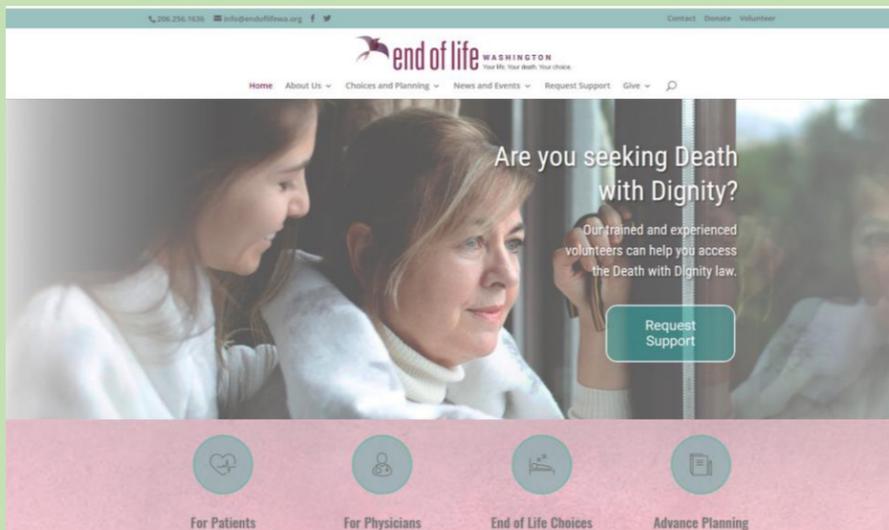
Kristy Monahan



Teresa Chiftis



Beth Rudolph



## EOLWA website gets full makeover

As many of you may have noticed, the End of Life Washington website has a full makeover.

The site's look, content, and navigation were overhauled to more easily and directly connect the public with our services.

The work was done by Nick Henderson who also has done work with end-of-life groups and other nonprofits across the country.

"It's nice to work with volunteer organizations," Henderson says. "There is a great life and spirit in them."

## INTERIM EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

# Joan's simple message: 'Farewell with gratitude'

By Joan Eads  
Interim Executive Director

With COVID-19 we are witnessing many heroes in the health care professions and with first responders. I am in awe of their courage and compassion. When I depart from End of Life Washington (EOLWA), after ten months of being the interim director, I will take with me the knowledge of many heroes I have witnessed on a daily basis at EOLWA.

Where do I even begin? I begin with the staff. Not knowing much about operations at EOLWA, new staff took on the task of learning, growing, and becoming important to the operation. They did this because they knew the work was important—essential. Then I think of the Board of Directors. Last July they were putting out fires daily, but never gave up or quit. They recognized that the services EOLWA provides are important—essential. And our donors. We have generous individuals who faithfully contribute to EOLWA. Some donors can only contribute \$10.00. What a gift to know that with limited income, they still chose to say that EOLWA is important—essential. Other donors have contributed large sums to EOLWA. What an honor to know that they have decided to share their resources with EOLWA. All are our heroes.

What I also learned over my time at EOLWA, is what heroes our volunteers are. They support clients who need help with the Death with Dignity Law. I often asked, how can they do that?

Why do they do that? Then I learned by listening to them, it is a calling, a sacred connection with the client, recognizing we are all walking each other home, where ever home may be. It is also a social justice issue for many of our volunteers. It is about choice, that each person should have the right to use the law when eligible.

Perhaps what I learned the most is the courage of those who have chosen to use the Death with Dignity Law. We call them "clients." *What I have learned is that these clients love life so much that they know when they can no longer participate in that life. They reach out to our volunteers when the day comes that they are ready to let go of this life. They are all of our heroes, teaching us how to live and how to let go. Some of our clients allowed us to share their stories so others can learn and be empowered.*

What a gift to me personally this time – my 10<sup>th</sup> interim assignment – has been. I have learned so much from all the nonprofits I have worked with. However, I have never felt so personally how important and essential this organization is for all of us. I too will die, but I will die less afraid because I know in this state, I have a choice. I also will die knowing this is as great a passage as birth. I thank all of you for teaching me to understand better what it means to be human. I leave EOLWA with deep gratitude. I know I leave it in good hands with all of you. Today we are stable, and growing our services. It is an exciting time for EOLWA and I look forward to watching from afar. Remember what you do is important—essential.



Joan Eads

## Planning under the specter of COVID-19

Here are some important considerations about your advance medical directives and planning during this international pandemic:

1. As long as you are conscious and capable of making decisions, you have the right to agree to, or to decline, medical treatment of any kind. So, if you have strong feelings about not being put on a ventilator, you can decline it.
2. If you do decline a ventilator, request palliative (comfort) care.
3. Advance directives only take effect when you can't speak for yourself and usually apply only to hopeless medical situations from which you are never expected to recover. If your values related to end-of-life choices haven't changed, there's probably no need to revise your advance directive.
4. Be sure that your health care agent or family has the latest copy of your advance medical directives and know where it is. Reach out to them now in the event that this fast-moving disease catches up to you.
5. Talk to your family about what you would and wouldn't want if you became ill with COVID-19.
6. If you go to the emergency room, take a copy of your advance directive with you so that you can provide it if you get admitted to the hospital.
7. If you have a Physician Order for Life-Sustaining Treatment (POLST), make sure that it's on your refrigerator and goes to the emergency room with you.
8. One of the silver linings of the crisis is that it's a golden opportunity to talk about your end-of-life wishes with family and other loved ones.

End of Life Washington offers state of the art Advance Medical Directives on its website (<https://endoflifewa.org/choices-and-planning/living-will/>). The organization also can answer any questions you have about your end-of-life choices.

## Progress in the Legislature

The short (60-day) legislative session was a historic one for improving access to end-of-life care.

Perhaps the most positive step for terminally ill patients is **HB 1608** – Protecting Patient Care. The new law prohibits medical organizations from preventing health care workers from providing information on end-of-life options such as Death with Dignity (DWD) and organizations like End of Life Washington.

**HB 2419**, another important bill, passed in the legislature but became a victim of the coronavirus pandemic. The bill would have authorized the UW to conduct a study and report on the barriers facing access to the Death with Dignity Act. Gov. Jay Inslee reluctantly vetoed the bill so the full energy of the university could be aimed at the COVID-19 virus. It will likely come up in the 2021 session.

A third bill, **HB 2326** – which didn't pass this session – would have required hospitals to publicly post their end-of-life and DWD policies so that patients can find out what services and information their local hospitals will and will not provide. The bill will likely be reintroduced in the 2021 legislative session.

We are grateful for our legislative champions, Rep Nicole Macri and Rep Skyler Rude who helped advance these bills.